

VZCZCXRO1864
PP RUEHAG RUEHAST RUEHDA RUEHDF RUEHFL RUEHIK RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHLN
RUEHLZ RUEHPOD RUEHROV RUEHSR RUEHVK RUEHYG
DE RUEHTH #0778 1570954
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 050954Z JUN 08
FM AMEMBASSY ATHENS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1920
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS ATHENS 000778

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ELAB](#) [ECON](#) [SOCI](#) [GR](#)

SUBJECT: CONSTITUTIONAL REVISION CONCLUDES WITH WHIMPER

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED -- PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) The Karamanlis government's ambitious plans for constitutional revision came to a lackluster close on May 27 when only 3 relatively minor (out of 38 proposed) constitutional amendments were adopted by parliament. With major opposition party PASOK removing itself from the constitutional revision process early on, PM Karamanlis was hard pressed to find sufficient votes for any constitutional amendments. Smaller opposition parties agreed to a few minor amendments as a tactic to forestall any further constitutional change until 2013; under Greek law, a period of at least five years must elapse between parliamentary consideration of any constitutional revisions. Among other things, this means that the government's proposed amendment to Article XVI of the Greek constitution to allow recognition of degrees from private, non-profit universities in Greece is off the table for the foreseeable future. End Summary.

¶2. (U) On May 27, the Greek Parliament voted on a series of proposed amendments to the Greek constitution, the vast majority of which had been proposed by the Karamanlis administration. Holding to its professed "position of principle" main opposition PASOK did not participate in the vote on any of the proposed amendments, having previously excoriated the government's proposal to amend Article 16 so that non-state universities could be legally established in Greece. To amend Greece's constitution a super-majority of 180 (out of 300 total seats) is required. Given the ruling party's tenuous majority of 151 seats, constitutional amendments are impossible without significant opposition support. Out of the 38 proposed amendments, however, only three were ratified, with votes from ruling New Democracy (ND), and opposition parties the Communist Party of Greece (KKE), the Radical Left Coalition (SYRIZA), and the Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS) parties.

¶3. (U) The three adopted amendments addressed mundane issues of little interest to the general public:

-- Amendment of Article 57 to allow seated MPs to continue to work in their chosen professions while serving in Parliament;

-- Unanimous revision of Article 79 to expand parliamentary authority to amend the central government's budget and monitor its implementation; and

-- A change to Article 101 to strengthen the parliament's role in supporting mountainous and island areas of the country.

¶4. (U) With this process concluded, any further effort to amend the Greek constitution cannot take place until 2013. Under Greek law a period of at least five years must elapse between parliamentary consideration of any constitutional revisions.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: The Karamanlis government had begun the process trumpeting key proposals to amend the Greek constitution; among the most significant were provisions to allow the legal establishment of non-state universities and allow recognition of degrees from private, non-profit universities in Greece, and to create a new constitutional court. Embassy Athens has lobbied the Karamanlis government and the opposition heavily in support of U.S.-affiliated institutions in Greece. Currently, these institutions are disadvantaged since degrees from these institutions are not recognized by the state. However, opposition to the proposed amendments centered on the educational provisions with universal disagreement from opposition parties and continuing violent street demonstrations. For the foreseeable future, these proposals are o